

September 17, 2007

Meeting with Governor Schweitzer

12:30 P.M. Montana Room, State Capital Building

Attendance:

Governor's Office: Governor Schweitzer, Mike Volesky, Bruce Nelson

Board members: Bill Hedstrom, Stan Boone, George Hammond, Meg Smith, and Becky Weed

Department personnel: George Harris, Sherry Rust

Public: Ariel Overstreet

The meeting began with discussion of letters and the 11 criteria required for split state status. The Governor explained that both Wyoming and Idaho lost their brucellosis class free status and then had to work to get that status back by following criteria as set forth by USDA. Idaho created a high risk zone and a buffer zone which requires higher testing and higher standards of vaccinations. While Wyoming established a buffer zone around the winter elk feed area and Yellowstone National Park. Both states were required to review established rules and create new rules for "high risk areas" and "buffer zones." The Governor's letter contained questions regarding federal departments with total differences concerning the brucellosis disease issue. He stated his feeling that the two departments need to communicate on these differences. One agency threatens Montana with the loss of their brucellosis class free status while other allows a large reservoir of the disease to roam free within their boundaries.

The suggestion made by Secretary Mike Johans of USDA is for Montana to begin the plan for split state status should another positive herd be found within the two year timeframe.

USDA does not implement a two area classification until there is another incursion of disease.

Governor Schweitzer stressed that had Wyoming and Idaho had a plan in place prior to the second herd they could have avoided state loss of class free status by implementing split state status.

The Governor went on to suggest that the board consider creation of a plan for split state status prior to another possible outbreak in an effort to avoid the problems encountered by Wyoming and Idaho. Pros and cons were discussed with a variety of questions asked by the board and answered by the Governor.

APHIS says answer the 11 questions and they will then look at split state status to allow pure breeders outside the hot zone to continue to carry on without sanctions. The event of another diseased herd could either be Montana loss of class free status where all producers in the state suffer the same sanctions or split state status where a minimal group of producers are sanctioned. The board needs plan and prepare for the best solution for the majority of state producers.

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Discussion of the Interagency Bison Management Plan ensued where pros and cons of the plan were touched upon. It does not meet all the needs but it is a platform to work from. The plan as it stands now does not include elk, but the plan is a living document that can be modified.

Bison are a Department of Interior issue until they move into Montana, while elk are a state issue, bigger hunts may be a partial solution.

The Governor urged board members to hold public forums and take the issues and proposed solutions to the livestock industry and local communities. Gather input and suggestions for solution to these issues.

The meeting ended at 1:35 p.m.

Submitted by Sherry Rust